



The Enlisted Perspective

By CMSAF Gerald R. Murray

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Priority #1: Our People

As units throughout our Air Force deploy, posture for deployment, or ramp up for accelerated operations at home, it's important to know that senior leaders are aware of how hard each of you is working, and that they are grateful for your dedication to the mission.

Nowhere is that appreciation more evident than in the President's 2004 budget proposal, which was unveiled last week. In that proposal, the largest chunk of Air Force money is focused on you – our greatest asset. People and quality-of-life initiatives make up 34 percent of the \$93.5 billion in Air Force money.

The most tangible part of that budget for most of us is the proposed pay raise, which ranges from 2 percent for our E-1s to 6.25 percent for our most senior NCOs. I want to take a moment and explain the “why’s” behind this proposal, and what it means to you as an enlisted airman.

We have enjoyed several targeted pay raises in the past four years in a concerted effort to bring our military pay into a comparable scale with that of our private sector counterparts with the same level of education and experience. We have been very successful in doing that for the majority of our junior ranks—the compensation for an airman entering the Air Force out of high school is better than 85 percent of their former classmates who chose to go to work in the private sector. That does not take into consideration enlistment bonuses, or other special and incentive pays the Air Force provides to some skills.

However, the gap between civilian and military pay widens at the NCO and Senior NCO ranks, with our senior NCOs in some cases earning only half of what their civilian counterparts with the same skills, education and experience level earn. The 2004 targeted pay raise proposal will continue to address that gap, giving an average pay raise of 4.6 – 4.8 percent to NCOs, and between 5 percent to 6.25 percent for senior NCOs.

Another factor considered in setting this proposal was the time a person spends in a particular grade. E-1s are in a transitional phase of their career. By the time an airman

completes basic training and technical school, most are already E-2s and E-3s. The high promotion rates of the past few years have also driven average sew-on times down; the average time for promotion to staff sergeant is now 4.6 years, significantly less than years past. Those same E-1s coming in now with a 2 percent pay raise will enjoy the benefits of the NCO targeted pay raises much sooner than in the past.

While we know we can never pay you enough for the sacrifices you and your families make for our country, targeted pay raises are a good way for us to reward the skill and experience of our retention-based force while giving our young airmen motivation to advance as they look up the pay scale.

In today's environment of high operations tempo, deployments and demanding missions, every member of our force is an integral part of the team, and we will continue to seek adequate pay and compensation for all you do. The Air Force needs each one of you to understand the immense value you are to the organization and to continue to carry your weight every day. Thank you for your dedicated service, and what you do for our Great Nation.



Gerald R. Murray
GERALD R. MURRAY